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STATE FOR DRL, G/TIP, INL, NEA/RA AND NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: CHAIRMAN, SEC GEN OF NEW UAE HUMAN RIGHTS NGO COMMENT ON
THEIR ORGANIZATION'S DEALINGS WITH THE UAEG

REF: A. A) Abu Dhabi 780; B) Abu Dhabi 953; C) Dubai 467;
[B. D\) 05 Dubai 3944](#)

CLASSIFIED BY: Jason Davis, Consul General, Dubai, UAE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1. \(C\) SUMMARY:](#) The Chairman and Secretary General of the new Emirates Human Rights Association said their secular-oriented group had formed in order to offer itself as a secular alternative to an earlier group dominated by "fundamentalists." In a worrisome development, the UAEG had attempted to put six representatives of the "security forces" (NFI) on EHRA's board, but the attempt had failed due to a technicality. EHRA was hearing reports that the government was afraid of the group, and was determined to move slowly in order to avoid aggravating the situation. A discriminatory interpretation of "emiratization" rules by the Labor Ministry was one possible issue the group might tackle early on. End Summary

[2. \(C\)](#) Over lunch at the house of Dubai banker Abdallah Saleh, the Chairman (Abdel Ghaffair Hussein) and Secretary General (Mohammed Obaid Ghobash) of the new Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA) recently approved in the UAE (reftel) commented on their organization and its genesis, agenda, and dealings with the UAE government.

Formed with Government's Blessing...

[3. \(C\)](#) Hussein said he had been thinking of forming a human rights organization in the UAE for "at least four years," and that the time had seemed right after newspapers reported that another group headed by an Islamist (Dubai jurist Mohammed al Roken -- see Ref A), had applied for recognition. Asked whether anyone in the UAEG had suggested that forming an alternate group would be a good idea, Hussein said slowly "it wasn't that simple....it was more a case of several of us seeing the application by the fundamentalists, and deciding we should offer up a secular alternative." The UAEG did encourage the group once it started down that road, he indicated.

EHRA Wins First Showdown With Gov't

[4. \(C\)](#) Hussein and SecGen Ghobash were gleeful at having "beat" the government soundly in their first confrontation with it. "The government tried to make us accept five current and former members of the security apparatus into our board, and the sheikhs in Abu Dhabi hinted that they wanted us to choose Mohammed Fahd Al-Dehim, another person affiliated with the security agencies, as our chairman. We had already agreed amongst ourselves that we wouldn't elect Dehim chairman, when the Ministry [of Social Affairs] removed him from the Board based on a technicality. The other five representatives from the security agencies then resigned in protest, so our problem

was solved," Ghobash related.

Taking Things Slowly

15. (C) Asked about EHRA's agenda, Ghobash said "believe it or not, we are hearing through various sources that the government is afraid of us. One of the sheikhs was quoted as saying that we are more of a threat to the system than even an elected and empowered FNC would be." As a result, he continued, "we want to take it slowly, and choose our battles carefully, so we don't alienate them -- though that doesn't mean we might not still find ourselves in jail one day," he concluded with a smile. Hussein said he had for several days been carefully working on the wording of a letter he wanted to send to Minister of Labor Al-Kaabi regarding a "discriminatory" policy on emiratisation. Asked to elaborate, the EHRA chairman said "Al-Kaabi has started telling companies with over 400 employees, who are required to have 2 percent of their workforce be UAE nationals, that only native-born UAE nationals 'count' -- that they aren't allowed to claim Arabs of other nationalities who have been granted UAE citizenship as part of their quota."

16. (C) CG asked the EHRA Chairman and SecGen whether they had any contacts among the Shihuh in the northern emirates, who seem to be the UAE nationals most likely to express dissatisfaction with the current system, particularly their inability to form any kind of local council (Refs C,D). Both men immediately dismissed the question, one noting that "they are not a UAE problem, they are Omani mountain men who just happen to live on the fringes of our society," and the other adding "their only problem is that the British in the 1960's promised them their own state, and then reneged on the promise in 1971, so they feel betrayed."

17. (C) Hussein said the human rights group was planning to open a small office in Dubai (currently it is headquartered at his "Green Coast Enterprises" office building on the airport road),

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and that eventually it would want to open one in Abu Dhabi as well. "The offices will have to be small, because we have decided not to accept UAE government funding, and would never consider accepting foreign funding," he noted.

Comment

18. (C) The allegation that the UAEG attempted to pack the board of this NGO with representatives from the security establishment is worrisome. The remaining board members seemed to assume that the government's failure in its first bid to monitor/control the group from within was not the end of the game, though it was not clear to them what the next step might be. The government's maneuvering to keep known Islamists from forming or participating in such an organization is perhaps understandable, given fears about extremist ideology seeping into the fabric of UAE society, but has the effect of severely limiting how "representative" the institution can be. Interestingly, the Chairman and SecGen of EHRA, while avowedly secular themselves (with the Chairman apparently being that rarest of all Emiratis, an "atheist," according to a comment whispered approvingly to CG by the host), made it clear that they support in principle the right of UAE Islamists to participate in academia and express themselves in articles in the media (two activities currently denied to many of them.)

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